

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 25THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
5 May 1980

Rice

Letters to the Editor**Comment on the U.S. Rescue Attempt in Iran**

The covert action operations of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), like the armed forces of the Pentagon, are subject to the commands of the President. History shows some mistakes in presidential direction of both the armed forces as well as CIA covert operations: President Johnson's direction of the Vietnam war was a disaster. In the mid-70s some abuses and excesses in CIA operations were discovered. But, in the 7,093-page record of congressional investigations of intelligence agencies, it is clear that each questionable action was responsive to White House direction.

Imperfect presidential direction of our armed forces is often criticized in the media, but is not seen as a reason to abolish or severely limit military strength. Yet, CIA "misdeeds," distorted and exacerbated by the media's ravenous appetite for sensational news, has led to spasms of remorse and moralistic overreaction. We unilaterally simply declared an end to the Cold War. Responding to cries for reform from civil rights groups, the President and Congress destroyed most of CIA capacity for covert action. The result is that today we have little choice between military action or accepting terrorists' actions against our diplomats and businessmen.

Without all the facts no one should criticize the President for the rescue attempt in Iran. This was not a CIA covert operation, requiring advance briefing of eight congressional committees. Yet, the unstable situation in Iran, with several competing groups, would be fertile ground for covert operations, if only some assets and operational capacity were available. Covert guidance and support of friendly indigenous factions could help achieve our objectives in Iran and other countries. Whether such groups exist and are available can be determined only by having some infrastructure and clandestine assets in place. The investigations by Senator Church and the influence of Vice President Mondale have assured that such capabilities are limited or non-existent.

Perhaps the Administration would now tolerate some covert action to influence events in Iran and Afghanistan in ways less likely to escalate into nuclear war. But, a viable covert action capability cannot be rebuilt in a few months. It would help to remove legislative restrictions and the Carter Executive Order of January 24, 1978. Also, acceptance by the Congress and the American media that an effective intelligence service cannot operate from Macy's window is essential.

San Antonio, Texas. **WENDELL E. LITTLE**